

Father's Life in His Own Words - Part 46

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A woman scavenging for subsistence in Seoul, November 1950. The following month, Father reached the city, pushing Mr. Park (Chung Hwa Pak) on a bicycle.

Taking the Refugee Trail to Begin Anew

Suffering the disappointment of not being able to gather almost any of his previous followers from Pyongyang, Father joined the countless refugees making their way south to find safer areas. Despite the perilous crossing into South Korea, Father and his two companions, Pak Jeong-hwa (Chung Hwa Pak) and Kim Won-pil, continued on south toward Busan, which was relatively untouched by the war.

The letter from a former follower

Those who followed me in North Korea were very enthusiastic people. They followed me day and night wherever I went, meeting with whomever I met. But after I was imprisoned, most of them disappeared. Even the most unforgettable among them drifted away. There was one person to whom I wrote a heartfelt letter and had someone deliver it to him. But then, when I went to visit him, he had already changed. He said, "If you are the Son of God, why did you end up in prison? Your teaching is all false." He didn't even care to read the letter. Instead, he said, "Oh, a heretic is released from prison! Did you come here to spread your heresy?" I took the letter back.

I was still carrying that letter with me when I passed through Yeongcheon, North Gyeongsang Province in South Korea. There, as I was crossing a bridge beside the railroad tracks on the way to Busan, I took out that letter and read it one more time. Then I tore it up and threw it away. That was January 18, 1951.

I already knew that even the most zealous among my followers could lose trust, betray me and leave. When I was in prison, that man's spirit had come to me, greeted me, and in tears told me the story of his situation, saying, "I am leaving you now." I had thought, "How can this be?" But, as I later discovered, it was at that time that he left me.

I made a resolution. A man must have something like that. Though he may not express it in words, he should have a goal, a banner, and dedicate himself day and night for the day on which he can bring his enemies to submission with his own hands. There were so many unforgettable incidents like that.

God provided

We came to a farmhouse in North Gyeongsang Province that it seemed the tenants had fled. We went in

and found an old woman and two middle-aged women. We told them we were passing by. It was January. We offered to sell them our blankets, which we were tired of carrying with us. We told them we didn't think we'd freeze, though it was a bit cold. We said, "They may not look so good, but they're made of good quality cotton wool, and though they're dirty, they're basically in good condition. We would like to exchange them for rice."

They said that they had no white rice but agreed to barter a bag containing about sixteen kilograms of unhusked rice for the blankets.

The bedding would have only weighed us down on our way to Busan. There was no ready-to-be-cooked rice to be found then. We husked it by stamping on it until we were bathed in sweat. We decided we would eat our fill of it. So we cooked all of the rice and made rice cakes, which the three of us sat down and ate. We left only about a bowl of rice, which we gave to the landlady. We had had so little to eat for so long, so we ate to our hearts' content. We stayed there a while before deciding to go on to Busan.

It took us about fifty-seven days to walk from Hamhung (North Korea). Under the circumstances, I begged for food on the way. What was interesting was that God knew everything so well. God knew already when we were hungry and worn out. One day I thought to myself, "The day after tomorrow, we'll be given some chicken." Then it happened that a lady came and greeted me, saying, "Welcome."

I asked, "Who are you? I don't know you."

She replied, "Last night, I had a dream of an ancestor of several generations back, who said that a noble guest would come and told me to prepare chicken and rice cakes for him. So I did."

I asked her, "How did you know what that guest would look like?"

She answered, "I was told he would come as a traveler in worn-out clothes."



A Busan refugee shantytown in 1952

Getting a free ride in a freight car from Ulsan to Busan

After that, we took a ride on whatever was available, whether it was a locomotive, a passenger car, or a freight train. When we saw a freight train, and we got on it. Which part of the train do you think we rode on? We rode in the locomotive. If we fought with the conductor in the front, we would be pushed back, but we could still ride in the rear. We told him that we didn't expect any favors. We said he would need us when he offloaded freight, so he should let us ride next to him. If he didn't, we would then insist that he let us stay anyway. If that didn't work, there was a bumper at the very front of the locomotive, and we would sit up there.

Overall, it took us two months to reach Busan from Pyongyang.

Which district of Busan did we come to? It was Choryang 1-dong. That place brings back memories. Now it seems deep in the past. I arrived there on January 27, 1951. It seems like yesterday that I stepped off the train at Choryang Station, but a long time has passed since then. At that time, how old was I? I was thirty-one.

A sense of mission and of history

You can't possibly imagine how dirty my clothes became on the way from Pyongyang to Busan. I had recently been released from prison in North Korea, so my hair looked absurd. My silk pants had become jet black, and the silk outer part had deteriorated, so I wore them inside out with the dyed khaki liner on the outside. Turned inside out, they were just single-layered green pants. That was what I was wearing. I had been wearing the same silk jacket for two months, so it couldn't have looked any worse. It was soaked in oily grime to such an extent that when it rained the raindrops just rolled right off it. I looked like a beggar, and in that wretched guise I arrived in Busan.

I wore work shoes or sneakers until they no longer had soles. I had to beg for food; how could I possibly have money for shoes? I continued to wear the same pair even though dirt would wedge between my toes. During the time I was a refugee, I wore just the one outfit for a whole year.

Even though I was dressed in rags, I would think to myself that one day in the future, after our hopes are realized, millions of people would come to look at the rags I had worn. I thought to myself that I had taken a historic mission on my shoulders, so when my time came, and I was in the environment where my mission could be fulfilled in reality, people would make up a play to act out the scene I was seeing on that day, with the lead actor playing the part of me in a real play. With that frame of mind, I would make my rounds in rags but with dignity, begging for food with the heart of the leading historical figure. I did not think of myself as unfortunate.

No one can fathom what I pledged in my heart as I was crossing the 38th parallel. Nor can anyone fathom the content of the prayers I offered for the future of the providence in South Korea while I was imprisoned almost three years in the labor camp at Hungnam, North Korea. No one can imagine my tearful prayers on the day I crossed the 38th parallel amid those sorrowful circumstances.

I can never forget my prayer for my mother and father, who raised me with their utmost love and care and whom I had to leave behind in my hometown. I prayed, "Please don't die. I regret that I had to be unfilial to you, but wait until I return." I also made a pledge while I was being tortured by the communists, "I will see the day with my own eyes that I bring your people to submit to God and praise His holy name. You will testify about Him with your own mouths. I will usher in that day before I die." You cannot fathom these resolutions of mine. They are lodged deep in my heart....

I underwent hardships, but they weren't just ordinary ones. As we fled south, the North Korean army was so close behind us that we could hear their shouts. Along the way we went through many dangerous situations due to the presence of the Soviet, Chinese and North Korean armies. Finally we came to the refugee area in Busan. Among the refugees, I believe we were the last ones to reach the area, arriving right after the battle at the Nakdong River. The South Korean forces had made their last stand. My path as a refugee was extremely difficult.

There were many unforgettable stories. While living as a refugee, I had no house; I slept outdoors on the grass or in the sandpits with the sky as my blanket, watching the stars and shedding tears of bitter sorrow for the Korean Peninsula.

These were not just steps in my personal life but steps to heal the wounds of God's bitter sorrow by paying indemnity for history. You should understand that from the very beginning I had already made up my mind that I would not tread a comfortable path. I am not the kind of person who looks back to see if there might have been another, easier, way.